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Letter from Sarah Whitney, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1870 February 8

Sarah Whitney

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Belmont Tues. Evng Feb. 8. 1870

Two hours ago we felt very dreary over the prospect of a terrific storm that was to block every highway & keep us subterranean in Egyptian darkness respecting the worlds progress. After keeping the curtains up an hour beyond the usual time to light the unhappy way-farers whom we had no reason to suppose were dead, seeing that the whole day had scarcely given us a glimpse of one, we had said for the last time, there is no use in looking for Edw., & pretended that we were resigned. To the situation we had closed the last shutter & drawn down the last curtain in the forlorn hope that our spirits might somehow be lightened by the help of kerosene, when in walked Edw. only an hour behind time, & looking ^{as} bright as though the encounter with the storm had given him a new lease of life. Certainly the letter wh. he brought has poured oil upon the north-easter, or cased our nerves in a storm proof garment. I can't think however that all our satisfaction can have come from these longed for, but unexpected circumstances - there must be some

~~some~~ lull in the storm, that we grow so much more hopeful for our fellows. Mother says - "perhaps there will be a bright sun tomorrow morning" - & father replies "I don't know about that" but he too thinks the storm has abated, & that it may not after all equal the one of 60 years ago wh. has been much in his thought since yesterday's breeding was followed by a great threatening circle round last night's moon. We have rejoiced in pretty good sleighing for some days, & a degree of cold that has promised some ice cutting if it (the cold) wd. but continue. Now we are glad that the cold is not intense enough to make the night more dreadful to those who are exposed to its ferocity. Since the papers have told us of the aggravating conduct of the French mails, I have been content that yr letters my dearest Anne shd. bear the mark "Via de Amburgo" though I have fancied it a somewhat slow coach. This one bears post mark "Gen 17" making 22 days from ~~xxxx~~ Rome to Belmont. I am not sure that a 3 Ct. postage stamp wd. make it for me "as good as being next door to our antipodes."

Wed. P.M. The wind raged frightfully all night sweeping however the sky in such a way as to make for us a beautifully bright ~~evening~~. When the roads become passably smooth I shall go to Newton with yr letter in the hope that I may hear something of our friends, of whose departure for Terre Haute I must have told you last week. The papers tell us what they may have told you before this reaches you - viz. that the will of Mr. S. made at T. H. in Nov. '68. has been presented at the Probate Court in Middlesex - that the executors thereof are Mary C. S., Mrs. Morton of Newton & Mr. Griswold of T. Haute - that the property is bequeathed in trust, annuities being provided for his sisters, brother, their children & his own daughter - & that after the death of these persons, what remains, is to be divided among "the grandchildren as they arrive at majority". I suppose this must mean his mother's grandchildren - & yet now as I write it, I recal that there probably are none - or not more than one or two who have not already reached their "majority". So it

must be a provision for Mary's children.
Poor Mary! I wish that she may have a
chance to recover her health & have some
enjoyment of her share. What her Mother
will contrive now for her child's misery
or what the child can do, tied up by
the Law, I know not. I know she is doing
to buy ^{the} peace that her Aunt looks for
only in the grave. Surrounded as the
two Marys feel themselves by an atmos-
phere of cruel hatred, I have no doubt
they will flee their country as soon
as possible. My own supposition this
with not the slightest hint from them
on wh. to base it?

I forget whether I told you that Fanny
Rollins Parks has moved into a house just built
by her husband not far from the Shannon home.
Last week her Mother spent 2 days with us, one
of them being the 45th Anniversary of her marriage.
As she was very bright, full of amusing anecdotes
that she can tell admirably, we had a jolly as well
as pleasant time. Her children (4 of whom are
living) are scattered from Maine to Minnesota
the 4 sons being respectively in Portland, N. York,
Phila., & Washington - each & all I imagine the
pride of the Mother's heart. The ex-Commissioner
grew old & grey fighting Andrew Johnson & his rebel
crew & came near dying in his effort to "stick" - but

made in the effort many good friends, & now
has his reward. While his mother was with
us the papers brought her a bit of good news
in the word that the Gov't, had assumed the
responsibility, & so the expense of a suit brought against
Edward, Ash, for libel by a man who was turned out of
the Internal Rev. office - The first removal made
by Pres Grant & by request of Rollins. She had
said before she saw the item, that her son had
no fear of the suit, excepting that it might
tell upon his purse to carry it on. Mr Stanton
was one of his best friends & his death of course
a grief to him.

Yesterday was a dreadful day for the last burial
of Geo. Peabody - but it was done I presume, & the
last joke I trust is made over the foolish
attempt to do a good man unusual honor because
he was rich. Prince Arthur fortunately is
sent back to his mother's dominion, & Boston
will have no chance through him to humiliate
herself.

When I read from yr letter that "you" never before
felt so like an exhausted sponge", Mother cried
"poor child" without waiting for the final, & it
probably lightened her heart. Carrie, reading

the same to day, said "Well! if you are so well satisfied with what Anne writes & she seems equally pleased with what I write, I don't know that it makes much difference how you both feel."

Perhaps she is right - so I will say nothing of the feelings of this child, but write on all the gossip I can pick up, begging my correspondent to do ditto, assuring her that Roman gossip is infinitely more interesting & true to art if not to nature like that Bavarian mountain, than Belmont little talk. I will wait now for a little while that it may gather, as Mother does after churning; trusting that ~~the~~ my butter may prove as soothing as Mother's is appeasing - Though I shd like to say in the way of modest suggestion as well as grateful acknowledgment, that Miss Clarks Christmas Pie tastes deliciously good on this side of the water & every household & social experience in Rome broadens & makes more cheery our own isolated lives.

Sun. A.M. Feb. 13 - How nearly gone is what we call Winter! With every good however we (?) conjure an attendant evil - sometimes it is a real one staring me obtusely in the face - as the days being delightfully long compared with those of 2 months since, the sun is rapidly running away from our piazza brand pastors. This week I shall have to put my pretty stand of plants

in an east window that ^{it} may receive the slightest of sun baths. - Then - we have had a beautiful ideal Spring-like winter - what can we look for but a Wintery Spring! I guess though it isn't best to look for any thing - what comes can be borne. Excuse me for writing out my Sun. morn'g reflections. I didn't go for to do it. It did itself.

I am sorry Rome is as far from Paradise in respect to housekeeping delights as is this Plymouth Rock vicinity. She has got the start of us in the institution of lutehas outside the house - but we are fast coming up to her. An account in yesterday's Advertiser of the "Rumford Co-operative Kitchen" will I doubt not turn the eyes of countless women living in the country longingly city-ward, & bring houses there into great demand. I trust the hope held out in the said paper is not all a delusion - a device of a real estate broker to dispose of property lying useless on his hands! We shall see! It is somewhat mortifying though, that while the women with Mrs. Pierce at their ^{head} ~~head~~ have been ^{soundly} such a trumpet of Co-operation before them, effecting nothing, a man or ^{some} men have surprised us with the full blown thing that the overworked women are asking for. Well! Man is dominant just now & holds the purse - & with it of course an increased executive ability. Women are working their way up - I am curious to

see how they operate in Wall St. A good deal of fear
mingles with my curiosity.

I hope you will read Mr Winthrop's eulogy upon
Gen. Peabody & like it as much as I do. It has repeated
for me the experience Fanny Hudson reports as her own
in looking upon the body as it lay in state some days before the
burial. After promising that her "wise little voice" thought the
old Aunt Clemented because she did not want to be wholly
out of sympathy with the great human tide swelling towards
the little town of Peabody" Fanny writes "I was very glad to
part with much of my pride of disapprobation & prejudice
when I saw the fitting tributes of respect & gratitude in
the place wh. had been so enriched by his public benefac-
tions. It seemed a fitting place & pleasant for this last
testimonial. And indeed it was well & appropriately
done. There was much beauty as well as deep & touching
meaning in the scene & I pondered many things wh. enlarged
my heart as I looked upon it". Lett gone deep disgust
my dear Anne shd have been growing in these months of
burying past the help of Mr Winthrop or any body else to
dissipate - & lest Fanny & I shd come in for a share of the
same, I must copy a little more with wh. I so fully sympathize.
"But the rest - the pomp & parade & waste, the cruel show
& long delay, all the Anti-Americanism by wh. we as a people
are so easily seduced - all has been dreadful. Poor man!
what a penalty for being rich!" And then she tells how
parts of the story in the First Class Book of "The Alderman's
Funeral" have been ringing in her memory &c. &c. I wonder
no one before her has thought to say "And the rich man also
died, & was buried."

It wld have been far more satisfactory to receive this long interesting letter of hers had I not known that an aching side & chest have of late made writing a painful labor to her. She says however that she is somewhat better - her trouble having been aggravated by severe illness in her Cousins family. There is a hope that with the general improvement she will get back at least to her previous estate. She sends much love to Anne - as did Aunt Sarah who made us a call yesterday. She has recovered from the attack she had a few weeks since while visiting at Charles but she has not her old strength. Fannie & the rest of the young people in the neighborhood, with the exception of Mary B. ^{one of the} went to a dance that Belmont furnishes once a fortnight to its gay & young people. Mary is trying to obey her Dr. & is said to be improving. It is a pretty sight to ^{see} her younger sisters bright & dandy skipping through the snow banks in their very becoming Bloomer or Gymnasium attire.

I can hear nothing of the Shannons, though I have been driven to the house once for the special purpose. The storm door being fastened, I did not reach the bell of the front door - & the dogs barked so furiously I was afraid to go to the back one. If the ways become decent, I shall make another attempt soon. The snow was badly drifted in the last storm, & during

for a ^{few} days ~~and~~ was somewhat perilous. Yesterday
came rain & thaw & a deep lament. To day is cooler
& probably very rough. I hope it will bring us face
to face with some of the Lambert family - for I have
not heard a word from them since Katy went to N.Y.

I shd'nt wonder if what you say of the success of non-
success of artists in Boston were true. The sale of Thompson's
collection of pictures ^{in N.Y.} must interest painters I think. I
suppose you will hear of it from head quarters. I think
from the prices quoted they cannot be as bad as they have
been represented. I had not heard before you
mentioned it, of the introduction of Nipso Glycerine into
the studio. In the Scientific Magazine wh. the Book
Club gives us this year perhaps we shall be told how.

I am glad to hear of Addy's improved health -
& also the evidence of an increasing appreciation
in the public of her skill as artist. Do we not know
that will be a good portrait? You have learned
on this that my suggestion about the frame for the
ethograph came too late - & if it hadn't I shd be
sorry enough to have deprived our visitors (to say nothing
of ourselves) of the pleasure wh. the framed picture
imparts. We must remember that under the new
dispensation "nothing is common or nuclear". In
the other matter of art criticism, I think you are
altogether right - & I shd prefer that Edwin shd
possess the few excellent touches rather than the
whole set wh. in his house I'd scarcely be well

disposed of. It seems to me in the hasty glance I
gave Mary's, that they are all interesting & beautiful
but that there is so great a similarity between
many, that it wd not be worth while for a person
who can possess but a limited number of such treasures
to have all these to the exclusion of a greater variety.

Mr. Longfellow is not preaching for us - I wish
he were - Then at this time I shd be on my way
to hear him & not inflicting my tediousness upon
my beloved sister. We have a different preacher
almost every Sun. but no one to fill Mr Weiss'
place. The congregation grows smaller & smaller;
& I fear the Catholics or some other church loving
people will soon be offering to buy the meetinghouse.

Gold seems to be behaving with great propriety
keeping very near 120 all the time. Edwin, I suppose
will speak for himself respecting "the bill". I am
as innocently ignorant of money matters as though
strong-mindedness was my honor. The Feb. account
with Prague, Hale & Co. came the other day with its
usual punctuality & I almost mustered sufficient
courage to ask E. to explain it - & that is all -

And all perhaps that I had better say on
any subject - except in the way of compensation for
the long string of nothings I will tell you that we
are all in very good health & send lots of love.

highest of. It seems to me in the last
year, that there was all the while a
but that there is a great a minority
many, that it will not be worth while for a person
who can produce but a limited number of such
to have all these to the expression of a greater society.
The Englishman is not preaching for us - I wish
he were - Then at this time I shall be on my way
to hear him a first reflecting my business as I have
my business children. He has a different
almost every day but he will fill the house
where. The propagation of good smaller & smaller
I fear the Catholics or some other church
people will soon be offering to pay the market price.
Gold seems to be dealing with great spirit
keeping very near to all the time. Indeed, I suppose
will speak for himself regarding "the bill". I am
as much as I expect of every nation in that
the Englishman is a very good man. The
with progress, but a Co. came the other day with
local franchise and almost universal suffrage.
Cowards to ask E. to oppose it. That is all -
But all perhaps that I had better say on
my subject - except in the way of comparison -
the long string of nothing. I will tell you that we
are all in very good health & send lots of love.